

Oral Presentation Tips

Being able to orally communicate is crucial in addressing environmental problems and issues, particularly in situations where collaborative efforts are required to develop practical solutions and affect change. The Nova Scotia Envirothon strives to challenge and promote the development of oral communication skills in each student participant, which is why the oral presentation is emphasized as a major component of the total competition score.

How to prepare the best possible presentation:

Do your homework. Nobody can give a good presentation without putting in some serious time preparing their work. Although many gifted speakers may look as if they're just talking off the cuff, saying whatever comes to mind, they have likely spent a considerable amount of time figuring out what they're going to say. You should too.

Know what the judges are looking for. Familiarize yourself with the Nova Scotia Envirothon Judges' Scoring Sheet for Team Presentations. If you know the sorts of things they are looking for, you can make sure you deliver them.

Play the parts. Good presentations are structured in sections. Organize your points into a few main parts and tell your audience what these parts are – both before and as you go through your presentation.

Do many dry runs. Practice does make perfect and this can help with both your timing and your manner of presentation. Be sure to make mental notes on if you went too long or if you got nervous or stuck - some people find it useful to have friends pretend to be the audience.

Look presentable. No need to wear a suit or anything fancy, but it's hard for people to take a presentation seriously when you look like someone who just rolled out of bed.

Talk - don't read. Nobody enjoys seeing a speaker reading stiffly from a piece of paper. Try to talk from point-form notes and look down at them only occasionally. It's less important that you capture the text word for word than that you present the main ideas in a natural and relaxed way. (Your practice sessions should help you here, since they enable you to better remember what you want to say.)

Take it slow. The single biggest mistake inexperienced speakers make is going too fast. Remember that your audience is hearing the material for the first time and isn't nearly as familiar with the topic as you are.

Don't bury the crowd. Including massive numbers of quotations or unfathomable amounts of data can overwhelm even the most attentive audience.

Be yourself. Your authenticity in presenting is as important as the material you are delivering, so don't try to be someone you're not. You'll never succeed.

Circle the crowd. A very important part of public speaking is to make eye contact with people seated in all parts of the room. That shows people that you are interested in communicating with them – not just getting through your presentation as quickly as possible.

Finish strong. Always be sure to have a satisfying conclusion to your presentation in which you make clear to the listeners what they now know. It creates a warm feeling in the minds of your listeners and shows them that they've really learned something from your talk - which they probably have.